

VZCZCXYZ0629
OO RUEHWEB

DE RUEHEG #0609/01 0871618
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 271618Z MAR 08
FM AMEMBASSY CAIRO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8698
INFO RUEHMK/AMEMBASSY MANAMA IMMEDIATE 0275
RHMFIS/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL IMMEDIATE
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L CAIRO 000609

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

NEA FOR DANIN
NSC FOR PASCUAL
CENTCOM FOR AMMONS
MANAMA PLEASE PASS TO NAVCENT

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/27/2028

TAGS: PARM PREL EG

SUBJECT: SUEZ UPDATE: INVESTIGATION, COMPENSATION AND
EGYPTIAN REACTION

REF: A. CAIRO 598

1B. CAIRO 581

Classified By: A/DCM William R. Stewart for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: As of March 27, embassy NCIS officer is conducting an investigation in Egypt. The MOD has agreed to provide autopsy results, but refused to provide the bullet fragments from the deceased's body. FM Aboul-Gheit publicly criticized the U.S. over the incident March 27, and complained to the Ambassador that U.S. military personnel's nervousness contributed to the shooting. The independent and opposition media ran sensationalized stories March 27 criticizing the U.S. over the incident, and the mainstream media reported that PM Nazif has been tasked to follow up on the shooting. We are currently consulting with the Governor of Suez on how best to express condolences to the family and provide compensation. MOD A/Minister for Policy MG Al-Assar advised us March 27 not to pay any compensation until "the investigation" is completed. End Summary.

12. (C) MOD Military Courts Chief MG Medhut Ghozi, who is heading the MOD investigation team, told Embassy NCIS officer March 25 that he would provide the results of the autopsy, but refused to provide the bullet fragments extracted from the victim's body. MG Ghozi told Embassy NCIS officer March 25 that fire from the "Global Patriot" hit only the deceased man, and that no one else was wounded in the incident. Military Intelligence BG Mohammed Kamal told NCIS embassy officer March 26 that there had been no public outcry or demonstrations in Suez following the incident.

13. (C) During a March 26 joint press conference with the visiting Luxembourg FM, Foreign Minister Aboul-Gheit called the incident "unacceptable," and said that Egyptian ports are not an "open firing range." In a private conversation with the Ambassador later that day, FM Aboul-Gheit commended the U.S. response to the incident, and explained that he had tried to avoid polemics during the press conference. However, calling the incident "very untimely," FM Aboul-Gheit said that U.S. sailors are "very nervous," and he recommended that they reconsider the rules of engagement to recognize that "Egypt is not Yemen." Aboul-Gheit said that U.S. Navy ships do not open fire in Italian or British ports. He said, "Imagine if anything similar happened with an Egyptian ship in a U.S. port, the captain would be cut to pieces."

14. (U) The independent and opposition press March 27 carried several sensationalized, inaccurate and highly critical

stories on the incident. Two sensational papers typically known for their outlandish coverage claimed the U.S. crew was drunk at the time of the incident. Opposition "Al Wafd" reported that the U.S. ship used "internationally banned" bullets, and that the autopsy was recorded live for the USG in Washington. Independent "Al Masri Al-Youm" quoted a professor saying that international law bans the use of weapons in the Suez Canal. (Note: the incident did not take place in the Suez Canal. End note.) The Egyptian media reported March 27 that Prime Minister Nazif has been tasked to follow up on the incident. Media also reported that the Egyptian cabinet expressed sorrow over the incident. State-owned Middle East News Agency (MENA) reported President Bush's condolence phone call to President Mubarak quickly and accurately.

15. (C) We are currently consulting with the Suez Governor to discuss how we can best express our condolences to the deceased's family and provide compensation. MOD Assistant Minister for Policy MG Mohammed Al-Assar told OMC MG Collings March 27 that the U.S. should not pay the deceased's family any compensation until "the investigation" is concluded. The following is an English translation of the Ambassador's letter sent March 27 to the Suez Governor.

16. (SBU) Begin letter text:

To the Governor of Suez, Seif Addin Jalal,

Following U.S. President Bush's conversation with President Mubarak, where President Bush presented condolences to President Mubarak on the death of Mohammed Fuad Afifi in the incident of the American ship in Suez, I would like to express the sorrow of the United States to Your Excellency, to the people of the Suez Governorate, and to the family of

the deceased, and also I want to take the opportunity to confirm that my government is cooperating fully with the concerned Egyptian authorities in investigating this incident

to ensure that such an unintended accident will not be repeated.

I want to ask Your Excellency's advice regarding the sensitive and sad issue of enabling the United States government to communicate with the family of the deceased in order to make aid and support available to the family in order to lighten their suffering during this difficult time, and to present the necessary compensation to them for this regrettable and sad accident that has touched the feelings of all Americans.

I have requested that my Embassy staff contact the Suez Governorate's Secretary General, General Adel Soliman, to discuss this subject.

And at the same time I am personally prepared to cooperate with you in every possible way to present aid to the family of the deceased.

End letter text.
RICCIARDONE